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Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force for the period from 1 January to 30 June 2010

I. Introduction

1. The present report gives an account of the activities of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) during the past six months pursuant to the mandate contained in Security Council resolution 350 (1974) and extended in subsequent resolutions, most recently through resolution 1899 (2009).

II. Situation in the area and activities of the Force

2. During the period under review, the ceasefire in the Israel-Syria sector was maintained and the UNDOF area of operation remained generally quiet. UNDOF supervised the area of separation by means of fixed positions and patrols to ensure that military forces of either party were excluded from it. The Force also carried out fortnightly inspections of equipment and force levels in the areas of limitation. Liaison officers from the party concerned accompanied the inspection teams. As in the past, both sides denied inspection teams access to some of their positions and imposed restrictions on the Force's freedom of movement. UNDOF continued to adapt its operational posture to the ongoing Israel Defense Forces training activities in the area of limitation on the Alpha side and Syrian civilian development growth in proximity to the ceasefire line in the area of separation. New defensive positions were constructed on the Bravo side in the area of limitation. Both sides maintained existing defensive positions in the respective areas of limitation. Israeli national customs officials continue to operate periodically at the Israel Defense Forces post at the UNDOF crossing gate between the Israeli-occupied Golan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

3. The Force continued to assist the International Committee of the Red Cross with the passage of persons through the area of separation. During the past six months, UNDOF assisted in the crossing of 23 students, 14 civilians and the mortal remains of one person, and supervised the handover of a Syrian male who had crossed into the Israeli-occupied Golan. In addition, UNDOF facilitated the transfer of 8,503 tons of apples and provided medical treatment to 85 civilians.

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4. In the area of operation, especially in the area of separation, mines continued to pose a threat to UNDOF personnel and local inhabitants. Owing to the long-term presence of the mines and the deterioration of their detonation systems, the threat has increased. UNDOF continued to carry out operational mine clearance. Coordination with other agencies is under way to assist in increasing the level of mine awareness among the civilian population, in particular children, as well as exploring ways to assist those who have been injured by mine accidents. In addition, in an effort to accurately and clearly mark the Alpha and Bravo Lines, which delineate the area of separation, UNDOF is carrying out a barrelling project. The project includes the erection of new barrels, as necessary, to clearly mark the respective lines on the ground.

5. The UNDOF Force Commander and his staff maintained close contact with the military authorities of Israel and of the Syrian Arab Republic. Both sides generally cooperated with the Force in the execution of its tasks.

6. In view of the population growth and multiple construction developments in the areas of separation and limitation, the expansion of agricultural and cattle grazing areas, and an overall increase in civilian activities, UNDOF has established a civil affairs capacity to liaise with the civilian authorities and engage with local communities in order to explain the Mission's mandate and activities. The civil affairs capacity complements the regular liaison UNDOF maintains with military and security authorities in the area of separation and limitation. In the reporting period, the efforts of the Force facilitated the cultivation of farms in the vicinity of the Alpha Line by Syrian farmers.

7. As at 3 May 2010, UNDOF comprised 1,043 troops from the following countries: Austria (379); the Philippines (343); India (193); Croatia (95); Japan (31); and Canada (2). A total of 15 personnel are employed by Japan as a national support element. In addition, 79 military observers from the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) assisted the Force in carrying out its tasks. The troop-contributing countries were briefed on UNDOF operational developments and activities during the period.

III. Financial aspects

8. My proposed budget for the maintenance of UNDOF for the period from 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2011, which amounts to $47.9 million, is currently under consideration by the General Assembly during the second part of its resumed sixty-fourth session. Therefore, should the Security Council approve my recommendation, set out in paragraph 14 below, with respect to the extension of the mandate of UNDOF, the cost for the maintenance of the Force during the extension period will be limited to resources approved by the Assembly.

9. As at 30 April 2010, unpaid assessed contributions to the special account for UNDOF amounted to $13.5 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to $1,240 million.

10. Reimbursement of troop and contingent-owned equipment costs have been made for the period up to 28 February 2010 and 31 December 2009, respectively, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

IV. Implementation of Security Council resolution 338 (1973)

11. The Security Council, when deciding in its resolution 1899 (2009) to renew the mandate of UNDOF for a further period of six months, until 30 June 2010, also called upon the parties concerned to implement immediately its resolution 338 (1973) and requested me to submit, at the end of the period, a report on developments in the situation and the measures taken to implement resolution 338 (1973). The search for a peaceful settlement in the Middle East, in particular the efforts undertaken at various levels to implement resolution 338 (1973), was dealt with in my report on the situation in the Middle East (A/64/343) submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 63/30 and 63/31.

V. Observations

12. The situation in the Israel-Syria sector has remained generally quiet. UNDOF, which was established in May 1974 to supervise the ceasefire called for by the Security Council and the agreement on disengagement between Syrian and Israeli forces of 31 May 1974, has continued to perform its functions effectively, with the cooperation of the parties.

13. Nevertheless, the situation in the Middle East is tense and is likely to remain so, unless and until a comprehensive settlement covering all aspects of the Middle East problem can be reached. I hope that determined efforts will be made by all concerned to tackle the problem in all its aspects, with a view to arriving at a just and durable peace settlement, as called for by the Security Council in its resolution 338 (1973). Since the discontinuation in December 2008 of indirect peace talks initiated by Turkey, there have been no negotiations between the parties. I encourage the parties to resume peace negotiations as soon as possible, aimed at a comprehensive peace in accordance with the Madrid Conference terms of reference for peace.

14. Under the prevailing circumstances, I consider the continued presence of UNDOF in the area to be essential. I therefore recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of the Force for a further period of six months, until 31 December 2010. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has given its assent to the proposed extension. The Government of Israel also has expressed its agreement. It is hoped that both sides will continue to make efforts to ease the limitations on the mobility of the Force and facilitate the movement of its supplies.

15. In conclusion, I wish to pay tribute to Major General Natalio Ecarma III, who assumed the leadership of UNDOF on 1 March 2010, and to the men and women serving with UNDOF and UNTSO. They have performed with efficiency and devotion to duty the important tasks assigned to them by the Security Council. I take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Governments contributing troops to UNDOF and to those which provide the UNTSO military observers assigned to the Force.